

Weather
 Today: Variable clouds, windy, flurries possible. High 42. Low 25.
 Saturday: Cloudy, windy, colder, flurries. High 34. Wind 20-40 mph.
 Yesterday: Temp. range: 32-53.
 AQI: 25. Details on Page C2.

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Prices May Vary in Areas Outside Metropolitan Washington (See Box on A2)

25c



Gorbachev, on a visit to persuade Lithuanians to drop independence demands, talks to residents of Vilnius, the capital.

Gorbachev Urges Lithuanians Not to Press for Independence

By David Remnick
 Washington Post Foreign Service

MOSCOW, Jan. 11—Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev began a critical three-day mission to Lithuania today by appealing to people there to temper their demands for the "dead end" of outright independence and by assuring them that he was prepared to work out a plan of "radically" increased self-determination for all the country's 15 republics.

Earlier, outside the Catholic cathedral in Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital, an estimated 250,000 people held a mass rally to dramatize Gorbachev and television audiences throughout the country their support for a return to Lithuania's pre-war independence.

Speaking to workers at a factory, Gorbachev said that the Soviet parliament will consider legislation setting terms for secession by republics.

Noting that the Soviet constitution provides for secession without specifying the steps, he said, "We need a mechanism on how a republic could leave the Soviet Union. We need to discuss the time frame for leaving, defense, communications and an entire series of questions."

But he also warned that "those who believe they can simply leave the Soviet Union must remind themselves not seven times but a thousand times or more that there is a constitutional order in this country. This process needs a mechanism."

Despite Gorbachev's appeals,

another member of the Communist Party leadership, Yuri Maslyukov, told Lithuanian party members, "Of course Lithuanians can decide their own fate—to stay in the framework of the U.S.S.R. or to leave it. . . . Our position is that it is possible to leave the U.S.S.R." Article 73 of the Soviet constitution grants the right of secession, but until now Soviet leaders have never spoken of that as a real possibility.

Maslyukov, head of the state planning commission Gosplan, added, however, that such a move required a popular vote in the republic and would invariably put a huge economic burden on Lithuania and the rest of the Soviet Union, according to the government newspaper Izvestia. He said he could not imagine "the collective wisdom taking such a step" and criticized the

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"agitation" of pro-independence groups.

He also said that if Lithuania did secede it would be obligated to pay "compensation" to those who wanted to stay in the union and were forced to move.

The leader of the pro-independence Sajudis movement, Vytautas Landsbergis, said that while Gorbachev is "a man of reason," Moscow in the end "must give back what was stolen."

Speaking to a small crowd gathered around him near a statue of Vladimir Lenin, the founder of the Bolshevik state, Gorbachev appeared eager to set a conciliatory tone. He said: "We shall decide everything together. If someone succeeds in pitting us against each other and it comes to a clash, there will be tragedy. We cannot allow this."

Gorbachev, in remarks broadcast nationally, told people that he respected their opinion and that they should respect his.

"There is no absolute freedom in this," he said. "We have started out on this road. I am the one that chose to go ahead with it. My own fate is linked to that choice." He said claims that Lithuania was not a part of the Soviet Union were "simply not serious."

How Gorbachev deals with the demands of Lithuanians is a crucial test not merely of his political skills but of the dimensions and limits of perestroika, his policy of restructuring. In Lithuania, Gorbachev is faced with a republican party apparatus that split with Moscow in December and a population that is overwhelmingly in favor of an independent Lithuania.

Gorbachev is hoping to convince Lithuanians—as well as movements in other republics—that both Moscow and the republics should define independence not as secession but rather as a union of sovereign republics.

For decades, Moscow has dominated decision-making throughout the country. The rise of glasnost, or openness, has unleashed long-suppressed feelings of bitterness among ethnic groups in nearly all the republics.

The clutch of people allowed to gather around Gorbachev did not taunt or insult him, but they did make their feelings known, telling him that they wanted independence—a word that still has various shades of meaning in the Baltic



Gorbachev reaches across the hood of his limousine to shake hands with residents of Vilnius on the first day of a three-day visit to the Lithuanian capital.

states. "Our lives have been like life in a dormitory," one man told the Soviet leader. "It's time we all had separate rooms."

At one point Gorbachev replied, "Do you think that if tomorrow you suddenly found yourself independent you would solve all your problems?" The crowd answered back with shouts that it indeed wanted independence, although some voices said, "If not tomorrow then step by step."

Gorbachev said the republic would "fall in a puddle" economically if it suddenly split with the union and was forced to reckon with world prices and markets. "Where are you going to run to?" he said, his voice rising with emotion. "Why run away? Instead he appealed to the crowds to 'join together' in his nationwide reform program and 'integrate all the forces and resources' of the union. He promised 'more decentralization, more democratization.'

Both here and abroad, Gorbachev has become a master of these situations, and, as usual, he let the crowd members talk just long enough for him to catch his breath and begin his appeals once more.

"You think it is all so simple," he said at one point. "The slightest violation in Estonia or Moldavia and it spills over into the rest of the country."

The emotional pro-independence rally on Vilnius' cathedral square featured the flags of Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia. The church bells tolled and the crowd sang the Lithuanian national anthem. One banner showed a map of the Soviet Union with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania missing.

The Baltic states, after a 20 years of independence, were annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940 following the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop pact with Nazi Germany.

In Washington, White House

spokesmen Marlin Fitzwater told reporters that while the United States has never recognized the Soviet incorporation of the Baltic states, "it is just not useful for us to speculate on [Gorbachev's] internal political problems. . . . We don't want to take any positions that are not helpful to either side."

Landsbergis said that Lithuania was greeting Gorbachev as the leader of a "powerful neighboring state with which we have had a long and difficult history but with which we do not want bad relations."

He added, "The Soviet Union has owned up to its past aggression against Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Afghanistan. Let it recognize the aggression against Lithuania."

Algirdas Brazauskas, the republic's Communist Party chief, called Gorbachev Lithuania's "greatest ally for realizing our aspirations." Justas-Vincas Paleckis, a member of the republic's Politburo, said that while Lithuanians must respect and

admire Gorbachev—"He is after all being bombed from all sides"—Moscow must recognize that Lithuania "has been a toy for politicians for hundreds of years and it refuses to be so any longer."

The Politburo's leading conservative, Yegor Ligachev, said in an interview published today in the Swedish daily Svenska Dagbladet, that "we cannot get around the fact" that the Lithuanian Communists "break with Moscow 'is meant to shatter the Communist Party. Such a threat should not be underestimated. Of course it is not the end of the party, but, depending on how you look at it, it could be the beginning of the end.'"

Asked if Moscow was prepared to use force in the Baltics, Ligachev said, "Tanks cannot solve such problems. It could be temporarily advantageous, but not for long. History is full of such examples."

Ligachev, who has come under fire this week in the official press,

"If . . . it comes to a clash, there will be tragedy."

— Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev

